

*Feb 11*

## The Truth About Trudeau

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Like many other immigrants, I speak differently than most. This generally prompts the question, “Where are you from?” My answer: “Canada.” In the era of Trump, this answer often invites exclamations about how wonderful it must be to have Prime Minister Justin Trudeau as my nation’s leader. Canadians must be so grateful to have such a charismatic symbol of a progressive, open society.

Well, not all Canadians.

If you were to poll students on a left-leaning American college campus about their opinions regarding Justin Trudeau, you would likely see overwhelming support. The Canadian population would largely disagree: Trudeau’s approval currently sits at 47% according to the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation, CBC, with numbers as low as 35% in the past. For some perspective, the widely-disliked Donald Trump has a similar all-time low.

My most recent visits home reveal this discontent. My family and I are from the rural, western province of Saskatchewan. Grossly generalizing, Saskatchewan would be the Canadian equivalent of Nebraska. Saskatchewan is unique for being geographically flat, economically agrarian, and, most notably, politically conservative. All of the “Prairie” provinces — Alberta, Saskatchewan, and Manitoba — share in their political leanings, but Saskatchewan is perhaps a prime example of what it means to be conservative in Canada.

The Prairies are very sparsely populated and demographically homogeneous. The cosmopolitan cities of Vancouver and Toronto often feel like a different country to many of the farmers working in the fields of Saskatchewan. Moreover, because the densely populated provinces of Quebec and Ontario outnumber the Prairies, the bulk of Canadian policy favors the interests of more liberal urbanites. This phenomenon is not too foreign to Americans familiar with the packed Eastern seaboard contrasted with the “fly-over country” of the Midwest and Mountain West.

However, the stakes in Canadian politics are wholly different. Conservative states in the U.S. are relatively insulated from a liberal central government, thanks to the constitutional guarantee of states’ rights. American states have any and every power not explicitly dedicated to the federal government, whereas Canada’s constitution specifically delineates what falls under the provincial purview while granting parliament the authority to make any laws necessary to “peace, order, and good government.” The federal government is the most powerful institution in Canada, given its many social programs that affect almost every Canadian’s daily life.

With Justin Trudeau’s victory in 2015, the election was called before votes were counted in the West. When elections are ultimately decided by liberal, eastern Canada, conservative western Canada cannot help but feel left out.

One of the most potent conservative forces in Canada is the Saskatchewan Party, a local political movement unapologetically championing the people and interests of one of the demographically smallest provinces in Canada. Brad Wall, former Saskatchewan Party leader and Premier — the Canadian version of governor — of Saskatchewan, routinely expresses the marginalization felt by western Canadians. Wall is nationally recognized for his willingness to criticize the federal government, Trudeau, and his Liberal Party.

Conservatives are right to point out Trudeau’s flaws; his economic policies in particular are shrouded in broken commitments and looming issues. Trudeau pledged during his campaign to abandon the federal government’s balanced budget and run a deficit to spur growth. As part of that promise, the Liberal Party planned to bring the budget back into balance by 2019. However, the Canadian government is projected to continue to run deficits for the foreseeable future. So far, the Prime Minister’s policies have succeeded in driving growth — Canada was the fastest growing G7 economy in 2017. However, the economy’s strength may not last, and there are some indications that a slowdown is coming. A ballooning deficit and, as a consequence, debt, can be adverse to the Canadian economy in the long run.

Political life in Canada is fundamentally different than it is in the United States. Canada’s demographics and history leave the system as a whole much more liberal than the United States. Trudeau’s politics are just one

example of this. In the 2015 campaign, Trudeau sparked outrage among Canadians for an interview with the CBC where he claimed that, “We have to know that a large percentage of small businesses are actually just ways for wealthier Canadians to save on their taxes.” Such a criticism of small business would be decried as socialist in the United States, and the candidate would have been ostracized from mainstream politics. However, in Canada, this comment was barely a blip for the Trudeau Campaign.

In fact, Canadian liberalism extends beyond Trudeau. Canada has its own socialist party, the New Democratic Party, which is considered a mainstream party and currently holds power in the provincial legislatures of British Columbia and Alberta. Canada also has a reputation for its universal healthcare system and extensive social welfare. As a result, taxes for middle and upper-class Canadians are noticeably higher than what an American would be familiar with. Coupled with a generally high cost of living, living in Canada is not necessarily easy.

This is not meant to be a hit piece against Justin Trudeau. He is a good man, a great leader, and a strong defender of liberalism during a period where norms and values seem to be constantly under threat. However, it is important to recognize the costs as well as the benefits of every political platform. To create an inclusive society, Canadians have sacrificed a great amount of economic freedom that Americans often take for granted.

In politics, personality is not everything. Trudeau has made his share of policy mistakes. His charisma and likability should not be excuses for bad policy. A similar statement could be levied against Donald Trump, whose crudeness made him popular despite his countless flaws. We owe it to Canadians and Americans alike, to hold our governments accountable and judge our leaders for their legacies, not their personalities.

*Global*

canada, trudeau



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